



ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD RESEARCH AS A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Background: Qualitative research method focuses on questions of cause and effects of human behaviour and experiences. These are flexible and are based on introspection. These methods are seen to be vibrantly complex where epistemological foundation becomes important. There are multiple ways of using data to study. The Applied method could be useful here. Qualitative methods do not focus on macro theories but rather it does on everyday experiences of life. The significance of epistemological and ontological questions in social sciences and the importance of evolution of methods help to understand the comprehensive view of the subject. The ultimate focus is on the multiplicity or plurality of the reality. The Qualitative method poses a firm critique against the positivist approach where it implies the importance of multiple realities not one singular entity. The notion of power relation in terms of hierarchy also gains ground. One of the eminent exponents of ethnographic research Bronislaw Malinowski popularized the idea of studying outside of one's comfort zone and initiated the ideas of outsider and insider views of study. This kind of study can lead to notions of inclusion and exclusion. The personal experiences are of utmost importance in social science researches. The importance lies within the discourse analysis, emotions, socially constructed values which seem to be profoundly evident in these studies. Malinowski studies the tribes and drew inferences of them and created good relations with them. The predominant requirement is the researcher should adapt himself to the surroundings and object of study by immersing oneself in an intensive setting. These studies can lead to unveiling of the real picture of the case being studied through first-hand knowledge. The notions of triangulation and creation of conceptual tools are important to study the social-cultural picture or the human behaviour. The focus should be on explicit understanding of real meaning beyond what is clearly laid out.

The inaccessible areas could be studied and the selection of a site and gaining of access by gatekeepers and exiting the site becomes essential. The extent of receiving information along with validity or reliability stands as the foremost pillars of qualitative studies in social sciences. Ethnographic study incorporates ethical issues which balances the credibility of ethnographic research.

KEYWORDS: Qualitative, Ethnography, Plurality, Epistemology, Ontology.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of qualitative method is focused on open ended methods and mainly applied to search questions of cause and effects of human behavior and experiences. Qualitative methods of research do not constitute of singular entity but it comprises of amalgamation of varied multiple viewpoints. The methods applied are flexible and is based on introspection. Researches can be conducted using many methods of qualitative and quantitative enquiries which uses more of qualitative analysis and is often vibrantly complex where epistemological foundation becomes essential.

Qualitative research aims at inductive application with every research having its own language. There are multiple uses of methods in a qualitative work, the applied method could be fascinating that studies a research problem and tries to provide a solution. It depends on rigorous ways of data management and different strategies are implemented for findings. This kind of work studies the meanings that are attached and explore and describes the data. It may have certain loopholes but it focuses not on grand theories instead of that it focuses on everyday lived experiences. Qualitative researches focus on the questions of what and why which implies the ontological and epistemological questions. Here the notion of pedagogical training becomes important by focusing on intensive analytical study. In social science the way of knowing concepts is different as it is ever changing and naturally complex and layered. The idea of methodology is important as it helps a researcher to understand the evolution of social science and the difference between natural and social vantage point of viewing ideas. The epistemological journey of social science becomes significant and the study of method provides an understanding of approaching a subject.

The epistemological and ontological questions lead us to know which method to approach. The ontology is the existence of beings or state of 'being' and every inquiry of research should start with this comprehensive dimension both in qualitative and quantitative analysis. It stresses on the 'what' question. The epistemological foundation is about the knowledge of the being or the process of gaining knowledge about the being; the 'why' question which is diverse. Quantitative approach does not give importance to value neutrality and for qualitative research it is more about accepting values. The qualitative inquiry involves more of informal, participatory, impersonal language. It relies more on plurality or multiplicity and is mainly based on inductive methods of research implying particular to general ways of research. It does not help in generating grand theories but rather leads to overlapping approaches.

The Transition in the Evolution of Qualitative Research Methods

In the 1950s and the 1960s there was a presence of binary of qualitative and

quantitative research methods. In recent times there is no binary due to the emergence of mixed method researches. There are certain focal areas of debate pertaining to qualitative methods which includes the fact that it poses a strong critique of positivist method. From the second half of the 20th century in social sciences there was a remarkable turn towards qualitative methods from the quantitative ones. There was the emergence of linguistic or post modern perspectives which focused on the limitations of sheer positivistic approach. The debate revolved around objective reality and scientifically derived knowledge that led to grand or macro data.

In the 1970s the Post Structuralist perspective was gaining ground focusing on understanding knowledge. There was a strong reaction towards quantitative approaches which was heavily borrowed from science and technology or computational revolution. This impacted the quantitative research methods hugely through aids like e-data and census data, SPSS, Excel which highlights the various software used for analyzing data. For qualitative approaches there is no one objective reality and for quantitative the focus is only on science and empiricism.

In the 1980s, the researchers were compelled to view the everyday life issues to study knowledge from distant reality or close proximity. According to Michel Foucault knowledge gaining is associated with power relation which is hierarchical in dynamic force.

The question posed was how knowledge can be viewed as singular entity when it is dynamic in nature. The post behaviouralist or post positivist approach focuses on multiple realities. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 4-6).

The post positivist methods analysis started from scholars like Max Weber who propelled the debates about objective and subjective reality. The eminent sociologist Bronislaw Malinowski, the founding father of modern ethnographic field researches worked on Pacific tribes and raised pertinent questions about gaining knowledge. In the 1920s the scholars of Chicago University or the Chicago School of Sociology played an immensely significant role in popularizing qualitative methods. (Hammersley, 2006: 4) The Chicago school raised questions like why after the first world war crime rates and anomie behavior increased, a group of them found that for the explanation of these cases they need not to go faraway places but they could study these from behind the walls of their university implying the newly emerged slums and the focus was on the unemployment or poverty. The concept of 'Neighbourhood' was given more importance.

The Drawbacks of Qualitative Research Methods

Malinowski went to faraway island to study the non white population but study could be form nearby places. The scholars argued that scientific perspectives create certain exclusionary areas. According to them this creates certain closures in the space of research. Scholars were of the opinion that single personal experiences are not given much importance and macro data are given importance as personal experience does not have merit of building theory. The academic sanctity or language creates closure. (Sangubasana, 2011: 571). In the 1978-79 the women's movement gained importance due to various incidents of women's oppression. The political became personal with the incidents like Shan Bano case of Triple Talaq. The positivist approach created social arrogance comprising of grand theory building or single reality. The qualitative approach speaks of inclusionary means or plurality of experiences. The need is to study the minute nuances of everyday lives by going deep into the society.

The Brazilian scholar Paulo Freire wrote the 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' which talks about method of learning and teaching or revolutionized methods of knowledge.

According to him the voice of the marginalized is not represented in the social structure and they are forced to inculcate the knowledge of the powerful. There is a gap in what they know and taught for instance Dalit boys and girls are leaving their schools as they are victimized and their version of knowledge is not included. The sexual minorities or the LGBTQ+ and their concept of knowledge were not represented and the macro theories will not be able to catch these nuances. For that researcher needs to study closely and deeply and social research is qualitative experiences. The disjuncture between thought and action is essential as thought and action cannot be separated. The idea of ground level wisdom is practically absent. Qualitative means integrated thoughts and action which creates practical wisdom that is implemented in everyday lives. The integration of thought and action is accepted along with fragile boundary between knowledge giver and taker. The researcher should be value free and must be able to dissociate from the reality. The position of researcher is significant and scientific knowledge talks about dissociation and large number of research takes place in personal experience. According to their opinion knowledge which is developed is not artificial knowledge. According to the feminist scholars living experiences of women are important for research.

The qualitative research talks about empathetic research by challenging the notion of hierarchy in gaining knowledge which involves emotions. Qualitative analysis is based on 'Interpretation' and is vibrant in nature. The knowledge that is generated is socially constructed. The concept of Hermeneutics or discourse analysis is significant involving interpreting a text in the researcher's own way. In the 1970s there came a challenge in the discourse of open ended researches and in the 1980s challenge was this kind of research should be correspondent with systematic enquiry. The procedures undertaken must be justified. Historical method, Narrative discourse, Field Ethnography, Case study, Feminist research and Action research are some of the methods of significant research.

Ethnographic Field Research as Conducted by Malinowski

Bronislaw Malinowski, the pioneer in ethnographic field research, has studied the peculiar features of the exchange system, social hierarchy and social practice like magic in Tobriand Islands which the islanders maintained among themselves (Malinowski, 1922:1).

He provided us with wonderful insight about the aborigines of Australia and gave adequate evidence with regard to the natives of Mallu in New Guinea. The economic organization of the trade was not based on simple calculation of profit or loss but based on some higher emotional and aesthetic needs combining commercial aspects, social aspects, mythical background and magical rituals. Both by theoretical training and practical experiences he was well equipped for this research task. He lived among the natives for many months, watching and conversing with them in their language, taking all the information from personal observations and statements provided to him by the natives without an interpreter. Malinowski collected high mass of evidence of scientific value bearing on social, religious, economic life of the natives. (Malinowski, 1967: 15) The process of ethnographic research and results of scientific analysis needs to provide detailed account of the arrangements of experiences, instruments used, way of conducting research and time devoted for experimentation and the degree of approximation. Many researchers cannot provide full methodic sincerity as facts given by them are full of obscurity. The actual experiences of the researches become very vital instead of reputed scientific hallmark statements and generalizations. In ethnography sources are accessible but not enmeshed in fixed material documents but in memories of men. The nature of a good research will be one where direct observation of natives and their statements along with inferences are provided based on his psychological insights.

The native's ideas about magic, sorcery and spirits were known by folklores but the English language became a barrier while studying the aborigines due to cultural hegemony of blacks and whites, but it did not become an impediment for studying them. Initially it was bit of an obstacle to study them. Good relations with the native needs to be created. There can be a gap between direct observation and inference, but there has to be fine relation between the time a

researcher reaches a place of study, gets in touched with them and tries to make final inferences from them. The researcher adapts himself with the surroundings by taking part in festivals and by observing small nuances of their lives. After Malinowski's first visit to New Guinea he felt directionless about the futile attempt to connect with the natives as they initially were not welcoming. There must not be some preconceived notions about research but getting reality of the setting or object of study is emphasized always.

The method in which the real picture could be analyzed is by real scientific aims, values and criterion of modern ethnography. According to Malinowski a white man needs to live among the natives without having any other white man. The collection and fixing of evidence is also vital and staying among the natives helps to create good rapport with them. Difficulties may arise but with time everything falls into place. The natives also adapt themselves with the white researchers who were alien to them initially. Inspired by scientific study a researcher needs to change his views according to evidences. More research problems would make researchers more equipped to work as per facts. The preconceived ideas are detrimental to good quality research but problems are endowment of thinkers and these problems are revealed to the observer by his theoretical studies.

Field Research, Research Design and conducting a good research

Radcliffe Brown's concept of studying from distant the native's life and analyzing it from foreign perspectives is called Veranda Model (Burgess, 1984:10) Bronislaw Malinowski for the first time broke this and started the model of going to the natives themselves. The idea of field research is quite intensive by immersing oneself in the settings and the study must be from deep inside not from superficially outside. The research studies the cultural meanings attached by people by living in a place for a longer time.

The debate became intensified around 20th century, some of the social anthropologists of Chicago schools initiated the concept that researchers need not to go outside one's country instead of that one can study the world within one's own home boundary for instance use of drugs, or about the use of technology by media (Burgess, 1984:13). The Insider view implies studying within one's own community like sociologist M.N. Srinivas studied the caste system in his own village, he studied as an insider which speaks of an analytical and positional debate. The outsider view is that the researcher is not the original inhabitant of a place (Burgess, 1984:17).

The setting of qualitative research should be known through books or certain literature existing and identifying the hypotheses and field research is based on first- hand knowledge like participant observation. The researchers goes to the field-site with Blank mind in Latin called as Tabula Rasa, going to the site with no preconception, it can make one biased.

But some background survey and archival data is required for his. Field research includes interviews conversation, recording, data collected with no fixed guidelines. Some critics call this as unsystematic method of collecting information. Amitava Ghosh in his work "The Hungry Tide" provides with documentation, materials, photos grounded on immersion in settings and has longer engagement. Field research is a research strategy which is flexible as to precise location and method. This kind of research is not rigid and aims to compare usefulness of various approaches according to Robert G. Burgess.

Naturalism connotes objective reality where what one researcher views and records that becomes his collection of information. The social constructionist research speaks of research which is based on socially constructed values. M.N Srinivas analyzed Brahmanical hegemony, but his viewpoints differed from rural uneducated masses. Early anthropologists studied the association of language and conceptual epistemological research hence constructionist viewpoint is seen. The theoretical framework is needed or broad objectives are important. The main point is to enter the field site and select the open or close settings for instance schools can be a closed setting for research where one needs to take permission. The research questions also depend on settings. The researchers need to have some acquaintances in order to gain access to closed settings. The role of 'Gatekeepers' becomes important where through snowballing technique one can gain access but ethical issues are also important. The insider and outsider roles are important as an observer or a total participant and the access is essential along with role of researcher. The mere imposition of narrowly defined theoretical questions should be avoided and extensive understanding becomes a pivotal rule in good research. The concept of good research is based on flexibility and unlearning various conceptual values. The development of conceptual tools is important along with method of triangulation where reliability of data is increased using gamut of various methods. (Sangasubana, 2011: 567) The idea of caste in India is interesting and Louis Dumont spoke of 'Homo hierarchicus' and was criticized by Indian scholars because Indian society is not uniform but dynamic. Dumont as an outsider was not able to evaluate the real picture which requires longer association with reality in an activist role. The colonial or ethnographic studies particularly in Africa, Asia, Latin America which focused on modernization project ('self' and the 'other') became pertinent in this context.

The Indian society in this regard is socially and culturally vibrant and dynamic but not static as the practice, process and evolution of caste in North and South India is strikingly different and the prevalence of caste or social mobilization

becomes evident.

The ways of conducting the Ethnographic field research

Ethnography comes from cultural anthropology where 'Ethno' means people and 'graphy' means to describe something. It basically implies description of people and their cultures. Researchers are constantly make inferences which means going beyond what is explicitly said to moving towards what is really meant or implied indirectly. People display their culture through external behaviours in social contexts and it cannot be fully captured what social meaning it has, so by using ethnography one can describe people's behaviour and infer the real meanings. Cultural symbols include songs, facts, ways of behaving and objects and learning through observing them is important.

The Tacit knowledge comprises of the detailed description or which captures closely the exact occurrences of events. This permits multiple interpretation helps in inferring deeper meanings. Ethnomethodology is a form of field research based on phenomenological philosophy and social constructionist approach that blends theory by philosophy and method. Naturalism is based on events occurring in a natural setting and social life has multiple perspectives and it reshapes self identity and personal values. The research constitutes specific techniques in observing and participating in small cultures. This becomes interesting as it involves interaction with various people in natural sites (Social Research methods, 2010:1). It could be time consuming, emotionally and physically draining. Many people are interested in field researches as they involve interaction with different people and face to face interaction with real people in natural social setting. Field research is appealing to those who enjoy observing. Field reports could be interesting unveiling accounts of unfamiliar worlds like homeless people, police squads, artist colonies involving thrill and mystery. It helps us to learn people's habits and behaviour. Field research helps in knowing the world that is inaccessible using other methods. Field research focuses on setting ranging from small groups to entire communities like street corners, church, bar, salons, football field.

Some researchers conduct experiments which are not in fixed place where intensive study can provide vital information (feelings of a person who has been cheated or death of someone near). Researchers explore wide variety of subcultures and aspects of social life (day care centre, coffee shop, bakery, nursing home).

Field research includes detailed accounts of varied cultures encountered by researchers. British social anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski for the first time lived with the natives for a long time and presented intensive fieldwork as a method and argued for separating direct observation and native statements from observer's interpretation. The best way according to him was to study directly from them their traditions, cultures, norms, mores or way of life. In the 1890s Charles Booth and Beatrice Webb used both field research and survey method to study poor people in London. Chicago School of Sociology also adopted methods like interviews, document or official records for collecting evidences. Robert Park in 1916 influenced researchers to get information from distant corners of a place. Participant observation was in vogue during the 1940-1960s along with journalistic techniques. The focus was on observation and developing large insights based on in depth knowledge of member's perspectives. It borrowed from linguistic psychology and folklore even explored epistemological assumptions based on systematic scientific study. Many of them imbibe a socially constructed view where instead of viewing people as natural medium they hold that people create social life through daily interactions. Social processes are attached with meanings and observer becomes an active part of his study and is self aware in itself.

Field research can include travel reports, giving insight into cultures but it lacks the real view of life and was ethnocentric (Social research methods, 2010:2). Ethnography comes from cultural anthropology and tries to move beyond what is really implied (Social research methods, 2010:3). Unspoken knowledge requires detailed description and helps in capturing exactly what has happened in larger contexts allowing interpretations. Schatzman and Strauss draw a wide range of umbrella method beneath which anything can be used for detailed knowledge connecting to meanings (Social research methods, 2010:5).

There are few methods of conducting research:

1.Preparation to enter a field should be flexible and one should have knowledge about oneself. In research one should not follow rigid rules but rather select techniques based on valuable sources and be able to adjust to fluid situation. They should select methods based on values and must be able to seize the right opportunities. Human factors are key actors in study of field research, the skill of careful observation, listening, regular writing and memories of details is useful for research. (Sangasubana, 2011: 568-569). Keeping short notes is important for research along with reading scholarly journals. Researchers need to have a broad mindset with no preconceived notions and essential is to go beyond any limitations. Researchers should have conscious unburdened mindset and decide on exclusion or inclusion of settings. Significant for researcher is to go beyond one's comfort zone without denying the commitment of a researcher. Keeping a track of previous field reports is pivotal like diaries, novels, autobiographies that helps in gaining familiarity and prepares oneself emotionally to enter the field. Researchers should be able to find the adequate

questions about social life which needs time, sensitivity and reflection. As a researcher it is vital to reflect on one's personal experiences and initially one may feel anxious and isolated. Emotional strength, background cultural experiences are extremely vital.

2. Selection of a site: A site is the context in which activities occur in socially defined territory with flexible areas. For instance training camps or football field. Important are rich data, suitability and diversity. Research can extend beyond limits of a site hence the cases must be evaluated within a site. Research questions are vital and it is interesting to view events in a new setting. It is important to study insider or outsider views but access could be a problem. Field research case can extend beyond the limits of a site and selection and identification of cases for analysis is significant.

3. Role of Gatekeepers: They are the ones with formal or informal authority to control access to sites like administration of a hospital, owner of a business. Permission is required from them and negotiations and bargaining for access is important. They may not appreciate role of distance and ethical balance. Research integrity must be ensured and trust should be developed with them. Sometimes it creates a stigma which needs more cooperation like prisoners may not be cooperative if they know that warden has given approval to the researcher. Many of the gatekeepers do not care for the observer's findings as they could be the reason someone would criticize them. Most friendly gatekeepers would shape the development of a research.

4. Entering and Gaining access: It needs common sense judgements and social skills, the bargains of entry may not be stable later. Need for fallback plan is significant. Access from lower stage is easy as gatekeepers are not always trustworthy. Gaining access by observing and clarifying facts becomes vital along with inferences from sensitive facts.

5.Assuming a social role: In daily life lots of roles are played by us like daughters, student and others. We need to choose roles which could be formal (bank, police) or informal (friends, elder relatives) along with switching or choosing multiple roles at one time. The success of a good research depends on how skillfully one balances symbolic interaction of processes presenting self and the social roles. The given role and performance in it influences the ease of access. Ability to interact changes roles in a site and appearance can limit our roles like change in hairstyle and dresses. Gender role can have vital impact as women and men can have some advantages or disadvantages in terms of access. Role assumption can be dangerous as in criminal cases or in case of inter-city drug dealer, mental asylums or war zones can be harmful for work.

6. Adopting a level of involvement: The level of involvement is based on member's negotiations and on detached outsider or insider intimate observation. As an outsider it might help to people to open up and secure identity. Insider lives help to fully understand native's lives but over involvement may have risks too.

7. Building of rapport: It might take time, opening up and forging friendly relations with being more close to people can be time taking. Social life may not be full of friendly people and they can be deceitful too. The need for sympathy is a must with use of other means to normalize research and stress coping is essential. Building of trust leads to gaining of more access to data. Initially there will be barrier of doubt later by explaining motives it could be normalized. A researcher is helped by other involved participants too. Gaining trust can lead to more disclosure. Researchers can reveal their purpose of study later.

Honesty and helpfulness can help in research. From broad assumptions later relevant questions could be formulated with help of multifaceted techniques. For instance researchers can compare a study over time through sampling methods. Focusing on various people, places, objects can be helpful in this regard. Paying attention to detail is essential and encountering the cultural strangeness is vital.

8.Noticing social breakdowns and coping with stress: Breakdowns can happen when two cultural traditions fail to enmesh and focus on meanings as hidden expectations becomes explicit. The unspoken rules are important and to reveal the tacit rules and caused due to social expectation. Field research could be highly stressful and also exciting. Factor of fear and emotional stress is unavoidable and contacts with good people helps.

9.Maintaining social relations and absorbing experiences: Some people might be friendly and later could change some might be uncomfortable at first and later change. Maintaining social sensitivity becomes important trust can be lost but it needs to be reaffirmed and need is to gain sympathy by small favours. There is a pressure to record and absorbing data is important and small details need to be noted like behaviour and presentation is equally vital. The process of exit or breaking away from the field is essential and it can be difficult based on involvement, the reactions of exit can be of anger or pain but making exit is mandatory. Avoiding conflict can be tough and personal feelings are important, using all senses is vital for small details (age, hair, dress) important is observing behaviour and social meanings and overload of information is common like maps, photo, videos, detail notes more information in less time can be provided. Insights from memories need discipline and notes must be taken with confidentiality which can be of interest of illegal workers, hostile parties.

Interviews in field can also help getting insights on sensitive topics comprising of descriptive structured and contrast questions. Access helps in gaining data along with proper introspection and reliability is vital about addressing whether a member is internally and externally consistent. These can be cross verified and reliability could be checked. Validity comes from accurate data and those cannot be replicated as contexts are ever changing. Ecological fallacy is setting remains undisturbed by the research.

Disclosure of actions is important to evaluate along with accepting site and its actions. The member accepts and recognizes the work and validation seems important, conflicting views can lead to disagreement. Ethical dilemmas can arise like covert research can lead to loss of trust but is useful in some research for gaining access, confidentiality includes a moral duty to keep a secret. Illegal work can be of interest to officials and idea of anonymity is essential.

Publishing a report can lead to loss of privacy as they cannot always maintain confidentiality leading to deletion of details. The study on ethnography mainly highlights the ways in which field study can be carried out including the credibility and ethical issues associated with it. The paper tries to focus on the processes in which ethnographic research can prove to be a helpful method in qualitative social science researches. The research question centers on the notion of comprehending the importance of behaviour or culture and highlighting the implicit meaning of a study. The prevalence of multiple standpoints and to analyze the practical nuances becomes the pivotal concern here. The study of Malinowski provides an exemplary instance to study ethnography especially in terms of developing countries. The multiple methods are commendable to analyze and reliable studies are based on that. The method of study used here is qualitative study based on descriptive analytical methods where there is a complex narrative but a unique understanding of utility of the qualitative research method.

In the concluding section, it can be pointed out that the way Malinowski carried out the research was attached to culture, behaviour and observation which is significant. Ethnography as it can be seen is an extremely effective and useful method for conducting good quality social science researches which mainly deals with human emotion and behaviour. The bedrock on which the edifice of qualitative research stands is complex and implicit where real life experience helps in fathoming the ground level practical situation. The socially made values or multiple realities are the focal point around which the method revolves as opposed to positivism. Ethnography as propounded by Malinowski is highlighting certain inclusion or exclusion of ideas. The intensive study with mixed methods are always conducive for conceptualizing the real meaning behind a study. The authenticity of research lies in reliable ethical study on observational insights.

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